

Semiotics, Nursing and Meaning-making – the one-to-one relationship in professional care

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Abstract: The dichotomy health-illness is a fertile ground to be explored in terms of our understanding of the social, cultural and historical trends, paradoxes and challenges of each epoch or time period. The current transitional context of the post-industrial knowledge economy of the information era brings about specific concerns that affect all levels of production and consumption. This presentation focuses on the importance of the personal, one-to-one relationship in terms of the role it plays within the setting of professional health care. The processes of meaning creation are directly linked to the narratives that are created and recreated within these personal interactions. Semiotics, in particular bio and social semiotics, enable addressing these issues through a non-dualistic approach, integrating theory and practice, mind and body, interior and exterior and individual and social perspectives. Nursing theory and practice has acquired an autonomous position in contemporary society. In a close relationship with other health care professions and scientific knowledge areas it has created a specific narrative characterised by the integration of both formal and informal aspects of the nursing profession. The formal side includes norms, procedures, rules, statistics, standards, protocols and routines. Conversely, the informal side is embedded in phenomenological concerns where meaning-making emerges from the use of language, the being part of specific communities and the participation in social practices. Both formal and informal aspects are moulded by personal, one-to-one relationships. Even before formal-informal distinctions, all that is informal prefigures and determines that which will become formal later, i.e. all formal processes were informal first. The present paper argues that there is the need to further explore and disseminate these insights for the benefit of the patients, the professionals and society at large.